

Timothy Radcliffe offers reasons for hope in the New Year

*An interview in **Le Croix** with the acclaimed Dominican spiritual guide and best-selling author who encourages us not to give up on our deep thirst for infinite happiness.*



"I believe that this profound human thirst for infinite happiness, which we all feel at times, is the most real thing there is. To hope for it is to live in the real world," insists Timothy Radcliffe, the former Master of the Dominican Order (1992-2001) who is now a best-selling spiritual writer and preacher.

Pope Francis selected the 78-year-old priest and friar to lead a retreat last October for the 363 members of the Synod assembly just before they began their deliberation on synodality and the future of the Catholic Church.

The theme he chose for that retreat was "**Hope against all hope**".

In this interview with La Croix's Christophe Henning, Fra Timothy explains why - even in our perilous times - there is reason for hope as we begin 2024.

La Croix: How would you define hope?

Timothy Radcliffe: During the general chapters of the Dominican Order to which I belong, we have always noticed a fascinating difference between "Latin" and "Anglo-Saxon" cultures. Latin cultures generally begin a discussion by defining terms. We Anglo-Saxons find it more fruitful to let the full meaning of words emerge gradually.

So, I am delighted that you are faithful to your French cultural heritage! And, out of courtesy, I must propose something: for a Christian, hope consists of believing that we will attain the fullness of the happiness we aspire to, namely God.

During the retreat you gave last October to the members of the Synod assembly you meditated on the phrase "Hope against all hope". Isn't that a bit crazy, reckless, and audacious to hope against all hope?

On the contrary, I would say it would be strange - even crazy - NOT to hope for this infinite happiness.

Human beings are sometimes touched by the thirst for limitless, unconditional love. If we reject this as an illusion, then we are saying that at the core of our humanity, there is deception.

I believe that this profound human thirst for infinite happiness, which we all feel at times, is the most real thing there is. To hope for it is to live in the real world. Children know this. I hope that education does not destroy this hope, which is the secret core of our humanity.

The world is currently being shaken by conflicts in Palestine and Ukraine. How can one not be worried and affected by this climate of war? One cannot remain indifferent...

Of course not! It would be scandalous to remain indifferent. The difficulty is that we so often see violence in the media that it is easy to escape its reality and think that all of this is just a game, as if the world's wars were harmless football matches. If only we could catch a glimpse of the true horror of war, we would weep deeply and strive for peace.

I saw a video of a young Russian soldier being hunted by a drone. He realized it was the end and shot himself in the mouth. I cried for an hour.

The reasons to worry are also related to the climate crisis. Can humanity still save our planet?

That deserves a very long answer! I would simply say that one of the causes of our destructive behaviour is the myth that we must pursue endless growth. That is an illusion. We need a new model of a healthy economy.

The second problem is that politics and business focus on the short term - the next elections, the year-end financial report. To get elected, politicians are forced to promise what they cannot deliver. Every politician is therefore a failed messiah.

In Britain, at least, the major political parties always insist that the other party is not trustworthy. So, it's not surprising that we are witnessing the rise of authoritarian regimes. We certainly need a renewal of responsible local democracy, in which we are trained in mutual responsibility.

How do we avoid fear in a world gripped by violence?

It is natural to be afraid in a dangerous world. Courage does not consist of not being afraid but of not being a prisoner of fear. Some of the bravest people I know are those who are afraid but still do what needs to be done.

I think of a Canadian Dominican, Yvon Pomerleau, who dared to return to Rwanda during the genocide at the risk of his life. The army came to our community to look for him: all the brothers had to lie on the ground, interrogated to reveal his whereabouts. He told me that he was there, trembling with fear, but he did not run away. That is true courage.

The Dominican theologian Herbert McCabe said, "If you love, you will be hurt and even killed. If you don't love, you are already dead."

Yes, we will be hurt, but the risen Lord appeared to the disciples and showed them his wounds. We are the brothers and sisters of our wounded Lord, and our wounds are a sign that we dared to live and share his hope.

How can we trust in the face of an uncertain future?

"Trust" is a beautiful word. It literally means "to believe together" - *confidens* in Latin. We do not hope alone but in the community of faith.

When I have doubts, another person may have the confidence to support me. When they lose hope, I may be able to help them. So, the more perilous the future, the more urgent it is for us to seek the common good together and not to lock ourselves into our own survival.

Is placing one's trust in God a refuge or an escape?

I have had the great privilege of living with people like Blessed Pierre Claverie, who was martyred in Algeria in 1996. He devoted his life to dialogue with his Muslim friends. He knew he was going to be killed, but he faced the future with confidence in God, and he gave us, his brothers, sisters, and friends, confidence.

I also think of Albert Nolan, a Dominican, who courageously fought against apartheid at the risk of his life in South Africa.

It is also so encouraging to live with people who face terrible diseases and ultimately death with courage and joy.

Where can we find hope? From prayer? Meeting others? Reading the Gospel?

Everything can contribute to it! Saint Oscar Romero was afraid of dying, but he was not defeated by that fear because he was a man of deep and silent prayer with the Lord. It was the foundation of his life. Everything he said stemmed from it.

With our closest friends, we can be silent and thus speak more deeply and be led to an even deeper silence. Some of my most precious memories are moments spent with friends in silence, in the presence of beauty, perhaps with a glass in hand!

What are your New Year's resolutions?

I would like to listen to more music. I am convinced that music is essential in our search for peace and harmony. It opens the door to transcendence. My life has often been a frantic race, where I tried to do a hundred things. I should devote more time to music.

It is also good preparation for eternity, which is probably not so far away!